

DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL

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CHP URGES SAFETY BELT COMPLIANCE

At a press conference today in West Sacramento, surrounded by wrecked cars along with representatives from The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, California Office of Traffic Safety and several Northern California law enforcement agencies, California Highway Patrol (CHP) Commissioner D. O. Helmick urged motorists to use their safety belts and showed graphic examples of why it is a good idea to obey the safety belt law.

“People are twice as likely to be killed or severely injured in a vehicle collision if they are not wearing safety belts,” the commissioner said, “The good news is that most Californians are buckling up.”

The event, held in conjunction with National Buckle Up America Week (May 18 - 25, 1998), highlighted the importance of using safety belts and child safety seats. That importance was underlined by the smashed vehicles on either side of the podium.

“Although these cars suffered total damage, their drivers and passengers did not,” Helmick said. “Thanks to occupant restraints, California’s mileage death rate is the lowest in history and safety belt use leads the nation.” The commissioner introduced the drivers and occupants of the crashed cars – all family members of CHP Officers – who avoided serious injury because they used occupant restraints.

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The importance of the safety belt law and its enforcement was made clear by the presence of nine different law enforcement agencies with the commissioner. “Vigorous enforcement of this law is vital to continued high safety belt use,” Helmick said. “Research shows that high visibility enforcement works because, with many part-time and non-belt users, the fear of a citation and significant fine outweighs their fear of being injured or killed in a crash.” Last year the CHP alone issued nearly 338,000 citations to unbuckled drivers and their passengers.

In 1997, 87.6 percent of Californians buckled up. The commissioner challenged the state’s motorists to exceed 90 percent this year so “California can be the first state in the nation to achieve this figure.”